

The Perfect Guru

Ram (James Swartz)

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Terry: Hi, James.

During the seminar I noticed that you frequently praised Carl but didn't praise others who have served ShiningWorld for many years. This doesn't sound right, and I wonder if you use proper reasoning when you praise him. He is passive-aggressive and uses non-dual statements, claiming not to be a *jiva*. Knowing this I would be doubly careful with your praise. This goes in hand with your endorsement of Mark because of his excellent technical understanding of Vedanta. I would be doubly careful endorsing anybody who has his political views. Furthermore, he did other things that should raise your suspicions regarding his values and thinking patterns. These examples should give you enough to chew on concerning your priorities. That's just some critical thinking on my part.

James: Thanks for enlightening me, Terry, but the letter is actually about you, not me. It is best if you have firm knowledge before you offer an opinion and it is good to think about whether the person for whom it is intended will actually benefit from it. Honestly, it is a violation of speech *dharma*. You might also profitably ask why you need to feel morally superior to others.

Terry: I didn't mean to be morally superior. What is speech *dharma* compared to the values of truthfulness and honesty? When am I allowed to speak up? I am confused by what you wrote. I must say I feel a little bit sad by your rather short and abrupt letter. I expected a more well-balanced letter. I even feel put down by your response. You gave me the feeling that I am not good enough, judgmental and an *adharmic*, arrogant person. I must also add that the way you respond to me changes my perception of the Vedanta lineage. I probably had inappropriate expectations.

James: Do you know what empathy is, Terry? It means that you are sensitive to the feelings of others and therefore you treat them with love. You say you feel bad, but you don't seem to care about my feelings at all. I have treated you with great love and respect, yet you disrespect me by suggesting that I have bad judgment, that I make people feel uneasy and who knows what other sins you imagine. You should feel bad because friends don't behave like that.

At the beginning of every seminar I make an important talk about how to listen. I mention that people can't help judging what they hear in light of what they think and how difficult it is to overcome self-centered judgments. I also am very clear about what kind of questions are actually permitted in Vedanta, i.e. questions concerning the teachings. I explicitly state that I am not interested in people's problems. But you're not relating your issues to the teachings at all. By criticizing me, you deflect attention from your own mind. I explain the Byron Katie work at most of my seminars. Perhaps you think it doesn't apply to you.

You should know the difference between teaching questions and irrelevant personal questions. If you have a suspicions, you can't expect me to resolve them, because

you will be suspicious of any answer I give. Go to one of the other swamis in our lineage and you will appreciate how much personal care I give you. I'm one of the top people in our lineage. Swami P. sent his *pranams* through a mutual friend last week. *Swami TV* asked me to teach one of his *satsangs* recently. Of the hundreds of dedicated inquirers I am in touch with, you are the only one who consistently thinks it is appropriate to question my judgment. Once or twice, okay, but this has gone too far. When people ask why I give you so much attention, I always speak highly of you.

One's thinking needs to be constructive and focused on one's own shortcomings, not the perceived shortcomings of others. If someone questioned your judgment, you wouldn't like it either. As the saying goes, why worry about a splinter in someone else's eye when there is a big stick in your own?

I have good reasons for doing what I do. It is none of your business who I choose to praise and why. It's none of your business who I associate with. I mostly accept everyone that comes to me because Isvara has some reason for us to meet, irrespective of their karma or character. Even bad people rightly resolved are to be loved and respected. I'm a successful, highly-respected person because I am empathetic and sympathetic. My whole life is dedicated to helping others. You didn't even bother to find out the backstory about my relationship with the people you criticized before you wrote that letter. From now on I don't want to hear reports from others concerning your complaints about me. People tell me everything. You should hold yourself to a higher standard.

Ask yourself how you feel when you write that kind of letter. It is not written out of fullness. It was written out of smallness and insecurity. When you left my home Saturday night, you were friendly and respectful. I thought we had a nice time. Were you just putting on a face? It would have been an ideal time to get your doubts resolved in person. They say familiarity breeds contempt, and I am starting to wonder if I have been a little too friendly toward you. Everything is fine as far as I'm concerned, but this is a warning. Don't second-guess me anymore. You can use your time much more productively. If you think I am a problem, you can find other friends.

Terry: The Sufis advise us to speak only after our words have managed to pass through three gates. At the first gate, we ask ourselves, "Are these words true?" If so, we let them pass on; if not, back they go. At the second gate, we ask, "Are they necessary?" At the last gate, we ask, "Are they kind?" I failed at part three.

James: Yes. They were not intended to make me feel good. They were intended to hurt me. You also failed at parts one and two. They were neither necessary nor true. They were just negative judgments about people, myself particularly.

Terry: I think that the cause behind my anger is a sense of anxiety that you and others might think badly of me. As a consequence, there is the fear of losing your trust, losing the *sangha* and losing my spiritual orientation.

James: Well, it's rather strange that you think questioning my judgment is going to endear me to you. However, this letter shows why my faith in your spirituality is justified. Inquiry into one's psychology is an absolutely necessary qualification for

Vedanta *sadhana*. The only way you can protect yourself from hurt is to trust *Isvara* and do your *sadhana* properly. One needs a *guru* but the relationship to the *guru* should be friendly and professional. The *guru* is not an emotional crutch. Transferring one's emotional dependency to *Isvara* is the proper way. *Tvameva mata cha pita tvameva. Tvameva banduscha cha sakaa tvameva. Tvameva vidya dravinam tvameva. Tvameva sarvam mama deva deva.* "You are my mother, father, friends and relatives. You are the giver of Self-knowledge. You are my light of lights." This is called *bhakti*. It heals you and purifies your relationship with people. I'm a successful, respected person because I treat people with love. It is not because I am enlightened or because I teach Vedanta. I knew your negative thoughts about me for years, but I treated you with love anyway. I bent over backward to encourage your spirituality. Your thoughts did not disturb my *shanti*. Everything has been resolved between you and yourself.

Terry: In your e-*satsang* you replaced my name, which is fine. But the *satsang* contains another sentence by which I can be identified by the ShiningWorld *sangha*. I would prefer that you don't upload our *satsang*. Is that possible?

James: You seemed a little surprised when I said that your letter was a violation of speech *dharma*. Perhaps now you have a better idea of what I meant. As you know, you can't separate *karma* from *dharma*. When you break a *dharma*, *Isvara* gives you bad *karma*. It's a simple thing. So are you saying that you aren't proud of "squeaking up"? If you speak the truth you are happy to stand by your words, but when you insult yourself with unkind speech, you want to avoid the consequences? It's pretty hard to miss the irony: asking the person you insulted to protect you from the results of your actions. Actually, many people in the *sangha* already know that there is a nasty side to your mind. Everybody has a nasty side. But cultivated people keep unsubstantiated opinions to themselves. If somebody asks if you wrote that letter, why not just admit it? Why try to hide it? You can just say, "I'm a fool. I regret it. I apologized to James and I made a vow to own my projections. James always treated me with respect. I feel very bad about it. It's amazing that he didn't write me off. If somebody did that to me, I wouldn't speak to them again." A pure mind has no secrets. See the fear. It comes when you break *dharma*. It doesn't mean that you are a bad person, it means that you made a mistake. Let's see what you have to say now.

Terry: I don't see how I got bad *karma* from sending you the email, James.

James: The bad *karma* is the continued worry that you might be exposed as a judgmental person.

Terry: I am sorry that I thought I could involve myself in your business and relationships. That was a clear misbehaviour. My email was not based on love and kindness, another misbehaviour. But I don't see it as bad *karma*. I see it as a learning curve, at your expense, unfortunately. Bad *karma* to me would have been to say nothing and repress my anger and fear that I was projecting. That to me would have been bad *karma*, as I would not have had the possibility to learn from it. Do you agree?

James: If you mean converting bad *karma* (meaning fear of exposure) to good *karma* (taking it as *prasad*), yes, I agree. That is the correct way to see it. I accept that you're at the beginning of the learning curve as far as self-control is concerned. The goal is to think through every course of action that involves relationships with others to see what probable effects it might have. *Karma yogis* are planners. They think ahead. Obviously I don't know what the result will be in terms of our relationship if I don't remove the sentence but since I see you as a friend asking a small favor, I'm going to remove it. When your mind is pure you won't judge others and you will like yourself a lot. It's hard to think highly of oneself when you hurt others. Remember, most statements about others backed by negative feelings are generally statements about one's own self. You will do this again, hopefully not to me. You can't help it – that is what *vasanas* mean. They compel action without asking the *jiva*. Just knowing that should make the *jiva* humble and increase one's love of *Isvara*.

Terry: I thought again about the *satsang* you posted at ShiningWorld and I repeat my request to you to remove it. You did not ask my consent to publish what I wrote to you and I am not okay with that. I did not at all intend what I wrote to you for public consumption.

James: It seems your mind keeps changing, Terry. The rule is that if you write, it can be published anonymously. Be objective. There is no evidence that “you” wrote it. Out of deference to you, I edited it a second time. It's an important topic, and it seems that *Isvara* needs to remind inquirers over and over about how to relate to the teaching and the teacher. If you learn nothing else in this life, you should learn how to keep your opinions to yourself and/or learn how to share them without causing others discomfort. How do you think I feel when you stick your nose in my business, particularly since I have been incredibly supportive of your spiritual inclinations? Behaving one way in the presence of someone while thinking something else is called hypocrisy. People have no way to read your mind, so if you keep your judgments to yourself, you will never have problems with them. Instead of taking this post as *prasad* you now want to manipulate the situation to avoid the consequences of your actions. I believe the problem is that you are ashamed of that letter. I reread it, and it is quite aggressive. This is all about how you are perceived in the eyes of others. What is the fear?

Terry: Hi, Ramji, or James. I never really know how to address you appropriately.

James: I've been using the word “James” lately because I want you to think of me as a regular person. “Ramji” is fine if you see me as the Self. It is a term of respect. It seems you have an idea of what a spiritual person should look like. Arjuna had this problem. He wanted to know what enlightened people look like. Krishna didn't answer, because there is no answer. You can't tell by their behavior unless there is consistent pattern of *adharmic* behavior. He answered by discussing their mental/emotional qualities.

Terry: Just to be clear, I have not given you my consent to publish the *satsang*. You need to know that it violates the European data regulation law. The consent of the

subject is absolutely necessary and can be revoked by the subject at any time. That you removed my name is fine, but I still feel uneasy about having something up there in the internet which can easily be changed again to my disadvantage by inserting my name.

James: Wow! That's an ugly thought. You actually think I'm petty and vindictive?

Terry: Plus I dislike the tone of the *satsang*; it is not pleasant, neither my part nor yours. Please take it down. I give you permission to upload the *satsang* about projections, expectations and countering projections instead.

James: My, you certainly are making a mountain out of a molehill. You aren't thinking very clearly, like Arjuna in the *Gita*. Your fear is thinking. I don't respond well to fear-thoughts. Let me help you understand. I don't need your permission, because you already gave it when you wrote the email. That is the rule of ShiningWorld. It is clearly written. Second, ShiningWorld is not subject to European law, because it is not a legal entity. It is a spiritual idea. Legally it is my website and I am an American citizen. European law only applies to European citizens. And finally, there is no way that anyone but you knows who wrote that email. There are no identifiers. So there is no way that you could prove that the person who wrote it was you. If you want I will turn you into a woman and identify as an Australian.

You are just feeling embarrassed and guilty, which are definitely appropriate feelings considering the situation. You should be grateful that I am kind, patient and open-minded. It's clear to me why you hole up in a cave. If you had to make your way on your own, you would have a very difficult time because the world is not always a "pleasant" place unless you are pleasant – law of *karma*.

Actually, the email is inspirational. It makes the person who wrote to me look contrite and humble. It makes me look good too because a normal person would rightly say, "Fuck you," and block your emails. It is a very nice story that starts out unpleasantly and ends pleasantly. I am going to quite enjoy editing it. It shows that you learned something. Think about the difference between your state of mind when you wrote it and your state of mind toward me today. A cynical person might think you were just buttering me up because you wanted to ask me to take down the email. But I know that you genuinely feel remorseful and that we now have a loving grateful relationship. You even sent me money, which is appropriate and much appreciated.

If none of this is to your satisfaction, why not just write me and the ShiningWorld *sangha* off? I'm getting tired of talking about this issue. It is over as far as I am concerned. You can go to another teacher. There are plenty of them out there. Or you can pursue some other path like the devoted Vedanta lover who changed his mind and became a flat-earther. Seriously. ☺ You can get a job and get married and make a family. Then you won't have time to indulge gratuitous negativity. Or you can dump it on your wife.

Terry: Yes, I agree with you that the topic of the email is important. But I don't think that it comes through clearly from the *satsang*. I think the *satsang* is quite messy and cobbled together.

James: I don't agree. I think it presents the essence of the problem very clearly.

Terry: However, the topic is very important and thus would benefit from further inquiry. It seems the main issue is that I have questions regarding your relationships to students and friends who were close to you at one time but are no longer in your life.

James: That's how it is in real life, Terry. People come together on the basis of their needs and when those needs are fulfilled (or not) they separate. Life does not always conform to a person's expectations and ideals.

Terry: You rightly pointed out that it is none of my business how you deal with relationships and conducting your organization. Plus the tone of my email was neither kind nor pleasant. I recognized my mistake and apologized for the uncultivated behaviour.

James: The point is that I have always shown kindness to you. I actually defend you when people ask me why I put up with immature, opinionated people. I see the Self in people. I know about their egos but I don't dwell on it. I respect their suffering and honor their inquiry. But it is important to keep an eye on how teachers treat their students because there are a lot of very power-hungry, love-starved, vain *gurus*.

Terry: The question now is to stop the projections (*tamas, rajas*) by transforming them into *sattva*. How to do that? By acknowledging the basic expectations behind them and countering them.

My expectations are that I have a perfect *guru*. *Tamasic* thinking, such as, "It would be much more comfortable to have a perfect *guru* about whom people congratulate me," is much more comfortable and easy than looking at reality to see that all *gurus* have feet of clay.

James: The *guru* is *mithya*, the disciple is *mithya*, the scripture is *mithya*. *Mithya* is never going to become *satya*. So get used to an imperfect world. Everything but you is imperfect.

The *guru Isvara* sends is the perfect *guru* for you because *Isvara* sends him. If you read the *satsangs*, which are mostly testimonials, hundreds of people think I am the perfect *guru*. So should I conform to your idea or theirs? In fact I don't conform to anybody's idea. I just follow my nature, and people either like me or they don't. I can't be bothered one way or the other.

Terry: The projection when I seem to find faults in your relationships is that you are not living up to my expectations. If you don't live up to my expectations, you are not good enough and I experience the shame thought (e.g. if newcomers ask me about you and even point the finger towards me for having such a *guru*, which is just a phantasy in my mind). But the funny thing is that this same pattern also happened in other areas of my life, such as the family or past relationships: the "you are not

good enough," the shame I feel, shame in front of others when I brought them to you destroyed my last relationship. So the conclusion is that I am projecting my own thinking to be not good enough and feeling ashamed of you! Does this come across clearly?

James: Yes. It is very clear. Your ego lives and dies based on the opinions of others. But others' opinions are just projections. What does anyone else know about you? In fact people in general are small-self obsessed; they don't really care about others, unless they think they can get something from them. Why should their views concern you? As scripture says, "The path is indeed difficult for the one who has expectations." Ask yourself why you are not satisfied with your life as it is. You will not be one iota happier if I live up to your fantasies. That uncomfortable part of your mind will just find fault with someone or something else.

Anyway, I don't think it was your shame that messed up the last relationship. Women want to know that the man they are with is not emotionally attached to someone else. They want you to be totally attached to them. That way they feel secure. If they see that you have love for someone else, particularly *gurus*, they get worried. Actually, Vedanta is not a great place to get a relationship with someone else, because most people are clear that they want freedom from relationships of all kinds.

Terry: The third step is to make a critical list of all the possible things that could go wrong that make me feel small and incomplete. Once I am aware of the list (which is not a very comfortable thing to do, anti-*tamas*, so to speak), I can be aware of them and eventually feel not affected by them.

James: I don't think that will help. Just monitor your feelings. If you feel negative – angry, guilty, ashamed, etc. – know that there is something wrong with your idea of who you are and take a stand in your true nature.

Terry: So far with my analysis. Do you agree with my analysis?

James: Yes.

Terry: Yes, there is fear. I just have to get used to receiving angry and self-righteous emails or looks. It was after all a good experience to receive Sundari's email because it showed that I can handle angry attacks by others and still reply in a cultivated way with the result that the anger on both sides seems to get directed toward constructive exchange.

James: Yes, you should take negative emotions from others dispassionately. Look at what they say and see if there isn't truth in it. Take the truth to heart. Sundari knows who I am, so she is naturally going to be irritated by ill-informed opinions. But notice that she didn't write you off. You can discount the emotion if you want, but if you actually have violated one of God's laws, righteous anger is certainly in harmony with *dharma* and should be respected. People need to be reminded of the rules.

Terry: Yes, I admit that the *satsang* is not necessarily a Michelangelo, it has a very strong emotional charge! Although I find the questions of your past relationships to be important, I admit that it is none of my business and that there are projections.

James: The problem is that you are focusing on a very small handful of relationships that seemingly went sour. To tell you the truth, I never had a bad relationship, because there is something to gain from every one. And I think you are identifying with these people because you are afraid that I will write you off. Why don't you assume that their problem is due to their faulty understanding or *adharmic* behavior? Why assume that there is something wrong with me? At the end of the day, you have to look to how I have treated you. There is no evidence that I have been anything but kind, helpful and friendly.

I will write you off, however, if you don't appreciate how much I have gone out of my way to help you. It's totally *adharmic* to judge me based on the opinions of others or on the basis of your own unsubstantiated negative feelings. On the other hand, if what people think is going to be the basis of your opinion about me, then why not identify with the hundreds of people who positively love me? Ask yourself what they are seeing.

See how irrational your thoughts are. If you want me to love you, love me. If you want to whine and complain, I will take myself out of the equation and you will have to find someone else to hook your bad feelings on. It's a simple matter. You are not going to have an easy life until you learn how to manage your *gunas*.

Terry: You are right, the email is inspirational and my relationship to you has indeed changed, as the blinders over my eyes have been removed. I can look again at your pictures with a clear vision of gratitude. I made a long list of your qualities that I am grateful for. The fear-thought is still there, but standing as awareness helps me objectify it.

James: Vedanta has a simple, elegant solution for every issue, but it's not for everybody unless they have enough *sattva* to remain introspective and apply Self-knowledge to situations that require it. You don't have to apply it to every thought, because you are already non-attached to most thoughts. But when there is attachment, i.e. negative emotion, the knowledge that you are pure perfect whole and complete awareness objectifies it and takes the sting out of it.

Terry: Well put, James! Yes, it is time to consider that others might be the cause of their failed relationships with you. You are right that it is better to consider the many lives you touch positively, their own lives.

James: Yes, people who have issues with me only have issues because they actually love me. If they didn't love me, they wouldn't bond with me in some way. It's just that their idea of love usually involves getting what they want from the people they love. And when I take away something that I have given or scold them for something or behave in a way toward others that they don't understand, they think that there is something wrong me and that I don't love them. But that isn't true. I have no

choice but to love everybody. That's what non-dual love means. *Isvara* is love, and love is your nature, so there is no way it can go away. But loving you doesn't mean that I have to subject my mind to your abuse.

Terry: The pinnacle, however, is to be aware of what you have given me. Everything else is just a distraction anyway! I can see the ignorance that made it so difficult to take up another perspective.

And yes, I always knew that the teachers and people I met bring valuable insights to me. Again, ignorance made it difficult to remember who I am. Thank you for taking the time to walk with me through the jungle of projections, James! It touches me deeply that you put in the time and energy to help me see clearly again. I might from now on call you lovingly my "eye doctor." I think that this is a nice *satsang*. Send me your bank details; I want to make another donation.

James: It is a nice *satsang*. So should I put your real name on it now so people can see how committed you are to overcoming your judgmental mind? It already makes me look good for forbearing in the face of your projections. 😊

Terry: Thanks for the great replies! A human birth is very rare. A desire for liberation is even more rare. A firm commitment to Vedanta is rarer still. A person who has a proper *guru* is even more rare, etc. Never look down on beginners. You were one once. Wanting anything, including wanting to be free disturbs the mind. Once you understand Vedanta, you can easily dismiss the "I want *moksa*" thought. It is only ignorance. You are free here and now. Why believe the mind?

James: My, you are positively inspired! Good for you.